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ABSTRACT

Samples of taped read .gs recorded by a black and a white speaker, each reading the identical two stories, were played to four groups of white teachers, 87 in number. The latter were asked to evaluate certain characteristics of the speakers, using an adjective checklist and multiple choice questions. Results indicated that the black speaker and his language were rated less favorably and triggered lower expectations about his ability and future academic achievement. The effects of the stories and interactions are described and the implications thereof for teacher training related to the teaching of reading are discussed. It is held that training and retraining programs need to provide teachers with the opportunity to explore their own attitudes about language variation in addition to information about linguistic differences. Copies of the stories used in the study and tables carrying test data are appended. (RJ)

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THE SOCIAL PERCEPTION OF LANGUAGE VARIATIONS:  
BLACK DIALECT AND EXPECTATIONS OF ABILITY

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Samples of taped readings recorded by a black and a white speaker (each read the identical two stories) were played to four groups of white future teachers (N = 87) who were asked to evaluate certain characteristics of the speakers, using an adjective checklist and multiple choice questions. Results indicated that the black speaker and his language were rated less favorably and triggered lower expectations about his ability and future academic achievement. Effects of the stories and interactions were reported. Implications for teacher training related to the teaching of reading were discussed.

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THE SOCIAL PERCEPTION OF LANGUAGE VARIATIONS:  
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There has been much discussion regarding possible social class barriers between teachers and students in urban classrooms. It is thought by many that middle-class teachers are imposing their values on lower class students, leading somehow to a cycle of low expectations, low student self-esteem, and low student achievement. However, most of the recent research focus is directed towards defining the characteristics of the so-called "disadvantaged" child rather than the interaction of teacher attitudes and behaviors with characteristics of different children. This study investigates one characteristic of children which is linked to their social class and racial background, namely their spoken language. The emphasis is not on "deficits" assumed to be reflected by the language of the children, but rather on the relationship between language differences and teacher judgments.

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## JUDGMENT OF LANGUAGE DIFFERENCES

It is quite clear that language differences related to race and social class do exist, and recent studies (Labov, 1965, 1966; Wolfram, 1969; and Fasold, 1969) have analyzed some of the phonological and grammatical variations associated with these variables. These differences, to the linguist, are evidence of the existence of different social communities and reflect divergent cultural and historical evolutions. Although non-linguists may differ in their ability to identify the specific variations produced by speakers of different backgrounds, it has been demonstrated that racial, regional, and social class identifications based on minimal exposure to speech are made with a high degree of accuracy. (Putnam and O'Hern, 1955; Ellis, 1967; Harms, 1963; Shuy, Baratz, and Wolfram, 1969; Bryden, 1968).

Some evidence exists about the judgmental processes involved when inferences about cognitive ability, friendliness, and moral behavior of speakers are made on the basis of limited speech cues. Research on social perception by social psychologists has indicated that a variety of physical characteristics are utilized by people in their creation of what are called "common sense theories of personality." Perceivers leap from a physical cue to inferences about the perceived's personality, and may develop expectations regarding the nature of possible future interactions with the person. Heider (1958)

hypothesized that interpersonal perception is an active process involving the interpretation of behavioral events by individuals seeking the assumed underlying invariant characteristics of others in an attempt to understand the myriad specific and changing events they observe. People attempt to fit these events into some internal structure of attitudes and experiences. For example, studies have shown that people are likely to be perceived as more intelligent, dependable, and industrious when wearing glasses than when not wearing them. (This and other relevant studies are cited by Secord and Bachman, 1964, p. 65). While such a characteristic--the wearing or not wearing of glasses--may not be extremely important in the judgment of others, it does illustrate a type of inference process, referred to by Secord and Bachman (1964) as "inference through analogy."

The various verbal categories used by people to describe others seem to reflect the kinds of "theories" people have about them. Asch (1946) has demonstrated that metaphorical terms such as warm or cold, deep or shallow, bright or dull, rigid or flexible are often used in our interpersonal judgments. Kelley (1950) investigated how such terms affect not only perception but also behavior towards others. Roger Brown (1965) has called these verbal categories "dispositional constructs" since they summarize expectations about future actions. Moreover, people may make judgments of this kind without being aware of how they arrived at them.

Language is a particularly powerful ingredient in these inferential processes. Not only can people correctly identify the racial, regional, and social class background of others based on language differences, but there are societal expectations as well as individual past experiences and attitudes that affect their judgments. Often negative stereotypes may be triggered. It is clear that speaking so-called "proper" English is generally seen as a reflection of status and success. Havinghurst and Neugarten (1967, p. 40) list the ability to speak "correctly" as the very first item in a list of generally assumed "do's and don't's" for the socially mobile person. Labov (1966) found a relationship between judgments of appropriate occupations for different speakers and the social class status of the speakers. Lambert's studies with French Canadian youth (1966, 1967) indicate that a listener's judgments of bilinguals reflect societal beliefs about different ethnic groups as well as the listener's own ethnic identification. His recent study (1969) with black and white listeners and speakers in this country indicates that societal norms and past experience factors interact for black listeners. While the black judges agreed with the white judges by being most favorable to the Standard English Dialect Speaker (called by Lambert the "Network English Speaker") who was white, they disagreed with the white judges and were least favorable to the "Educated Southern Speaker" who was also white.

Negative judgments of the speech of black people reflect a poor understanding of the relationship between language and thought. While cognitive psychologists certainly recognize the complexity of this relationship, most people seem to be operating on the assumed equation: language = thought. One is more likely to hear "he sure sounds stupid" rather than the statement "his speech indicates some cultural differences which may lead me to make incorrect inferences about his ability and behavior."

#### TEACHER ATTITUDES AND EXPECTATIONS

There is much observational and some research evidence (Naremore, 1969; Hughes, 1967) to indicate that teachers, both black and white, often regard the speech of black children as inferior. Stewart (1964), having interviewed teachers in many parts of the country, reported that not only did teachers regard black speech as inferior, but they seemed to consider any deviations from "Standard English" as a departure from "normal" behavior. Thus, the speech of the black lower class child is seen as a stigma. As Goffman's (1963) "stigma theory" indicates, others have expectations about stigmatized individuals which influence interpersonal behavior. The so-called "non-verbal child" may have been created by just such a process. Crosby (1964) observed attitudes of teachers can affect their own behavior and the behavior of their students.

Nine times out of ten, youngsters who sensed the teacher's disapproval of how they spoke or what they said, would refuse to speak out in class. Then the teacher would conclude, "poor little things, they can't express themselves." But back in their own neighborhoods these children had a very dynamic language. [p. 138]

With regard to social class, a large study by Herriott and St. John (1966) reported that both principals and teachers expected lower class students to drop out of school, to be socially and emotionally immature, and to be discipline problems. While these results may seem to many people to be reflections of "social reality," it is possible that the expectations themselves help to produce that reality, creating what has been called a "self-fulfilling prophecy." As sociologist Merton (1957) has said, the behavior of men is a reflection, not only of the objective features of a situation, but also of the meaning they have ascribed to it. With regard to race relations in America, Merton states:

As a result of their failure to comprehend the operation of the self-fulfilling prophecy, many Americans of good will (sometimes reluctantly) retain enduring ethnic and racial prejudice. They experience these beliefs, not as prejudices, not as prejudgments, but as irresistible products of their observation. [p. 421]

The possible effects of providing teachers with "objective" information have been investigated by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968), Beez (1968) and Gess (1969). All these studies report some evidence in favor of a self-fulfilling prophecy phenomena, although more research is needed on

identifying specific behaviors of teachers based on low expectations which may be perceived as negative by students. Since these studies involved providing teachers with pseudo-psychological test results and interpretations, some examination of institutional practices which support the development of negative expectancies might be advisable.

The present study was designed to investigate teacher judgments and expectations based on language differences. It was limited to an exploration of the judgments of white future teachers. It was hypothesized that a black speaker and his language would be judged less positively than a white speaker and his language, and that less favorable expectations would be reported for the black speaker.

### Method

Subjects. The subjects were 87 college students, 27 males and 60 females, enrolled in four classes in a teacher preparation program.

Construction of Materials. Two ten year old male speakers, one black and one white, each read the same two passages. The black speaker was working class, the white speaker middle class. Both passages were taken from a transcript of an interview with a black student and, therefore, were casual in style and contained hesitancies and some features of black dialect. These passages were

chosen in order to avoid an artificial reading style, and to provide realistic content. It was expected that phonological differences associated with race and social class would produce sufficiently identifiable differences to trigger different listener judgments of the speaker and the speaker's language.

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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#### Semantic Differential and Multiple Choice Items.

After listening to one of the passages twice, each group of Ss judged four concepts: Teacher, Speaker, School, and Speaker's Language on fifteen polar adjective pairs (semantic differential scales; see Figure 2).

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Insert Figure 2 about here

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In addition, Ss completed multiple choice and open-ended questions dealing with perceived age, racial, regional and social class background of the speaker, number of assumed grammatical errors, and inferences about the speaker's educational ability and potential success. Also, Ss were permitted to supply any additional information they felt they had learned about the speaker.

Procedure. Two of the four classes were randomly assigned to listen to the black speaker and two classes were randomly assigned to listen to the white speaker. Ss were given instructions as follows:

We can often tell a great deal about others from just listening to them speak. You are going to hear a child speaking for a short period of time. Please listen carefully and try to fill out the questionnaire. Work quickly. We are interested in your first impressions.

Each S read the standard directions for completing the semantic differential (Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum, 1957).

All four sessions were conducted in the same manner, except that they each heard a different tape. Groups I and II heard the same black speaker but different stories and Groups III and IV heard the same white speaker but different stories.

## Results

### THE SPEAKER

Results of the analyses of variance of the semantic differential ratings used to assess effects of Race, Story, and Race X Story are summarized in Table 1.

— — — — —

Insert Table 1 about here

— — — — —

Race. The black speaker was judged as relatively more "unpleasant," "dull," "disadvantaged," and "ugly." In addition, there was a tendency to see him as "mysterious" and "unpredictable."

Story. The few significant effects for story indicate that the content of Story Two increased the negative judgment of the speakers; both were seen as more "bad," "unfair" and "violent" when they read Story Two.

Race X Story. The black speaker was viewed as more "familiar" when talking about the disruptive behavior in Story Two, but more "disadvantaged" when talking about the physical punishment given by the teacher in Story One.

#### THE SPEAKER'S LANGUAGE

Table 2 summarizes the results of the analyses of variance for the speaker's language.

— — — — — — — — — —

Insert Table 2 about here

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Race. The black speaker's language was rated less favorably on 10 out of 15 rating scales.

Story. The one significant story effect indicated that the language of both speakers was seen as more "disadvantaged" in Story One.

Race X Story. The black speaker's language was rated more "unpleasant," "unfair" and "violent" in Story One while the white speaker's language was judged more negatively on the same adjectives in Story Two.

In addition, results of a multiple choice item indicate that Ss perceived the black speaker as producing a greater number of grammatical errors.

— — — — —  
Insert Table 3 about here  
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#### THE TEACHER

While of only secondary interest, the behavior of the teachers in both stories was evaluated by Ss using the same semantic differential scales. The teacher in Story One (who hits the child) was rated more negatively on 9 out of 15 scales (all p values less than .05) than the teacher in Story Two (who was locked out). The teacher in Story Two was seen as more "violent" when the black speaker was talking. Ss also judged the teacher in both stories to be more "dull" when the black speaker was heard.

#### THE SCHOOL

There were only three significant results on Ss ratings of the schools, most Ss judging both schools equally

as negative. The school in Story Two was seen as more "unpleasant" ( $p < .05$ ) and, when the black speaker was talking it was also perceived to be more "familiar" and "understandable" ( $p < .05$ ).

#### BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS OF SPEAKERS

The black speaker was accurately identified with regard to race and social class, but inaccurately with regard to place of residence. More Ss saw him as Southern.

— — — — —  
Insert Tables 4, 5, and 6 about here

More Ss identified the white speaker as younger than his actual age.

— — — — —  
Insert Table 7 about here

#### EXPECTATIONS ABOUT ABILITY AND FUTURE EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Almost half of the Ss who heard the black speaker judged him to be below average or slightly retarded in ability.

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Insert Table 8 about here

Fewer Ss thought that the black speaker would continue his education beyond high school.

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Insert Table 9 about here  
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#### JUSTIFICATIONS FOR JUDGMENTS

While not quantitatively analyzed, responses of some Ss on open-ended question: "What else, if anything, do you feel that you know about the speaker?" indicate that many Ss attempted to excuse the behavior of the white speaker. He was seen as having been "coerced" into attending an "overcrowded" school which did not provide "proper guidance." Many Ss attested to his "sincerity" and "good behavior," and saw him as "an observer rather than a participant in the events described." More blame was placed on the school than on the white speaker or his home environment.

In contrast, Ss volunteered additional negative information about the black speaker's home background, personality and ability. He was seen as "selfish and intolerable," as not easy "to capture attention from," and as "having emotional problems." His home environment was blamed for his "poor" language skills, and he was perceived as dominated by his peers. A number of Ss seemed to feel that he instigated the class to do what they did.

## Discussion

The major focus of the present study is the evaluations of black and white speakers by white future teachers. It was hypothesized that the speech of a black speaker would be relatively less positively evaluated than that of a white speaker, even if both were reading identical stories. Speech differences were expected to be sufficient to provide accurate identification of the racial and social class background of the speakers. Such perceived differences were believed to trigger negative evaluations of the black speaker's ability and attractiveness and lower expectations about his future academic achievement. The data reported support, for the most part, these hypotheses. Many negative judgments were made and limited speech cues seemed to trigger lower expectations for the black speaker.

The Ss' consistently more negative ratings of the black speaker based on limited language clues seems to indicate that inference processes such as those discussed in the literature review are being used. Also, the Ss' evaluations suggest that societal stereotypes as well as their own attitudes are being indirectly measured. Moreover, they may not be aware of the extent to which linguistic variables trigger such categorizations of individuals.

Responses made to the open-ended question asking for any additional information suggest that the negative content

and "non-standard" grammatical structure of the language of the white speaker was seen as incongruent with Ss' expectations. Positive expectations may have been triggered by a combination of racial identification and pronunciation cues which suggested middle class status. The negative judgments of the black speaker, on the other hand, seem to represent the kind of inferential processes commonly evidenced in evaluations of minority group individuals. If there are any "relevant" cues, the members of such groups are made to fit into the stereotype. In short, as a result of these inferential processes, the behavior in the stories when reported by the white speaker was seen as incongruent with his being perceived as middle class white and necessitated rationalization in order for positive evaluations to be made. For the black speaker, the behavior reported in the stories was seen as congruent with his being perceived as working class black and with expectations related to these perceptions; thus, additional justifications for negative evaluations were offered.

Whether such differences in evaluations would be reflected in differential behaviors toward black and white students cannot be ascertained from these data. The possibility that expectations affect behavior and some relevant research mentioned in the literature review suggest the need for further investigation. Also, the kind of background characteristics of teachers which might be related to their

evaluations of black and white speakers has yet to be explored; for example, the race, age, social class background and experience of the teachers might be considered. A study of judgments made by black and white urban teachers is currently being completed by this investigator and includes the analyses of these and other background variables as well as additional attitude measures.

#### EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

The variety of ways, both verbal and non-verbal, by which teachers communicate their negative feelings to students needs to be categorized and used in training programs. Teachers probably provide direct feedback about perceived language inadequacy to their students during the monitoring of oral reading. Even if the student's miscues do not indicate lack of comprehension, his pronunciation may be corrected. If the teacher is unable to distinguish mistakes in comprehension from differences in pronunciation which reflect dialect variations, or if the teacher fails to indicate the different types of corrections made, the student may perceive all attempts to provide feedback as negative evaluations of his language and himself rather than as helpful hints to improve his reading performance.

There is some evidence that teachers of reading cannot distinguish adequately among reading mistakes, pronunciation differences, and spelling miscues. Labov (1965) asked 80

teachers of reading to make such discriminations and found them unable to do so. Gorman (1965) has warned elementary English teachers of possible misinterpretations based on their lack of knowledge of the black reader's oral language and attitudinal factors which might produce inefficient and unfortunate teacher behaviors. He is currently undertaking detailed analysis of types of oral reading miscues made by students; such data will be particularly valuable to teachers of black as well as Spanish speaking children.

Training and re-training programs need to provide teachers with the opportunity to explore their own attitudes about language variation in addition to information about linguistic differences. Such programs may produce some modification of the inferences that seem to lead teachers to perpetuate self-fulfilling prophecies of failure.

FIGURE 1  
STORIES READ BY BOTH SPEAKERS

Story 1

Once I went to the school and we were going to gym and we didn't have any gym pants -- was the first day to go to school -- and there was too many kids at this, in the gym class, so we couldn't play basketball, and the teachers said we had to exercise and they wouldn't get down on the floor and exercise, so this one boy and the teacher started to fight -- and the teacher hit that boy and made all of them go stand up by the wall.

Story 2

Once I had to go his mean school. This lady said it was a mean school. And so I had to go to this mean school. These children, they were so mean, the teacher wouldn't even turn her back on them. She thought they would throw books and crayons at the teacher. So they, the children, started calling the teacher names, like "Moe" and "Old Seahag" and all those names. So the teacher got mad and went down to the office to get the principal. And the principal came back with the teacher, and they tried to get in the room and so they couldn't get in. The children throw the books out the door, out the window. So they locked the door, so the principal and the teacher couldn't get back in.

FIGURE 2  
SEMANTIC DIFFERENTIAL SCALES

pleasant	_____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____	unpleasant
understandable	_____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____	mysterious
unpredictable	_____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____	predictable
good	_____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____	bad
dull	_____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____	bright
follower	_____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____	leader
inexact	_____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____	accurate
fast thinker	_____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____	slow thinker
motivated	_____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____	unmotivated
unfair	_____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____	fair
violent	_____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____	gentle
advantaged	_____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____	disadvantaged
quiet	_____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____	noisy
ugly	_____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____	beautiful
strange	_____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____	familiar

TABLE 1

F RATIOS: JUDGMENTS OF BLACK AND WHITE SPEAKERS

Adjective Pairs	Race	Story	Race X Story
Pleasant-unpleasant	7.75***	N.S.	N.S.
understandable-mysterious	3.51+	N.S.	N.S.
unpredictable-unpredictable	3.33+	N.S.	N.S.
good - bad	N.S.	11.41***	N.S.
dull - bright	7.88***	N.S.	N.S.
follower-leader	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.
inexact-accurate	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.
fast thinker-slow thinker	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.
motivated-unmotivated	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.
unfair - fair	N.S.	4.16*	N.S.
violent-gentle	N.S.	7.40***	N.S.
advantaged-disadvantaged	9.09***	N.S.	6.40**
quiet - noisy	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.
ugly-beautiful	6.33**	N.S.	N.S.
strange-familiar	N.S.	N.S.	4.53*

\* $p \leq .05$  Tabled value = 3.92\*\* $p \leq .025$  Tabled value = 5.15\*\*\* $p \leq .01$  Tabled value = 6.85

+ = close to significance in expected direction

TABLE 2

F RATIOS: JUDGMENTS OF BLACK AND WHITE SPEAKERS' LANGUAGE

Adjective Pairs	Race	Story	Race X Story
pleasant-unpleasant	15.97***	N.S.	4.05*
understandable-mysterious	33.46***	N.S.	N.S.
unpredictable-predictable	5.49**	N.S.	N.S.
good - bad	25.92***	N.S.	N.S.
dull - bright	15.89***	N.S.	N.S.
follower - leader	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.
inexact - accurate	9.95***	N.S.	N.S.
fast thinker-slow thinker	8.74***	N.S.	N.S.
motivated-unmotivated	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.
unfair - fair	N.S.	N.S.	8.87***
violent - gentle	N.S.	N.S.	7.89***
advantaged-disadvantaged	16.41***	7.79***	N.S.
quiet - noisy	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.
ugly - beautiful	14.24***	N.S.	N.S.
strange - familiar	12.86***	N.S.	N.S.

\* $p = < .05$     Tabled value = 3.92\*\* $p = < .025$     Tabled value = 5.15\*\*\* $p = < .01$     Tabled value = 6.85

TABLE 3  
JUDGMENTS OF NUMBER OF GRAMMATICAL ERRORS OF SPEAKERS

Race of Speaker	No. of Errors	
	less than 20	more than 20
Black (N = 37)	17	20
White (N = 49)	37	12

$$\chi^2 = 7.89, p = < .01, 1 \text{ df.}$$

TABLE 4  
PERCEIVED SOCIAL CLASS OF SPEAKERS

Race of Speaker	Social Class	
	upper to lower middle	working to lower
Black (N = 38)	5	33
White (N = 47)	34	13

$$\chi^2 = 29.64, p = < .001, 1 \text{ df.}$$

TABLE 5  
JUDGMENTS OF RACE OF SPEAKERS

Actual Race of Speaker	Perceived Race of Speaker	
	Black	White
Black (N = 38)	35	3
White (N = 43)	1	42

$$\chi^2 = 65.85, p = < .001, 1 \text{ df}$$

TABLE 6  
JUDGMENTS OF GEOGRAPHICAL RESIDENCE OF SPEAKERS

Race of Speaker	Geographical Residence		
	North or East	South	Midwest
Black (N=36)	9	15	12
White (N=45)	22	3	20

$$\chi^2 = 14.63, p = < .001, 2 \text{ df}$$

TABLE 7  
JUDGMENTS OF AGE OF SPEAKERS

Race of Speaker	Age of Speaker		
	Younger (6-9)	Correct Age (10)	Older (11-14)
Black (N=38)	16	9	13
White (N=48)	27	15	6

$$\chi^2 = 5.81, p = < .10, 2 \text{ df}$$

TABLE 8  
EXPECTATIONS OF ACADEMIC ABILITY OF SPEAKERS

Race of Speaker	Perceived Ability		
	Above Average or Average	Slightly Below Average	Below Average or Slightly Retarded
Black (N=38)	10	11	17
White (N=48)	26	19	3

$$\chi^2 = 18.13, p = < .001, 2 \text{ df}$$

TABLE 9  
EXPECTATIONS OF FUTURE EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF SPEAKERS

Race of Speaker	Level of Attainment		
	Drop-out of H.S.	Graduate from H.S.	Some college, college grad., graduate school
Black (N=35)	17	15	3
White (N=42)	11	18	13

$$\chi^2 = 7.23, p = < .05, 2 \text{ df.}$$

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